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MUFFLON

THE DOG OF FLORENCE





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MOUFFLON

The Dog of Florence

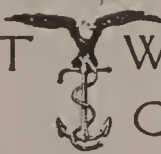
By

LOUISE DE LA RAMÉE

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RETOLD BY SARA D. JENKINS, PH.B.

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MOUFFLON
THE DOG OF FLORENCE

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MOUFFLON.

MOUFFLON

THE DOG OF FLORENCE

Moufflon's master was one of a family of poor but merry boys and girls. Their father had been dead five years, and their mother's care was all they knew.

Tasso, a lad of nearly twenty, was the eldest of them all. He was so kind, so industrious, so cheerful, and so gentle, that the children loved him very dearly. Tasso was a gardener, and mainly the bread-winner.

Moufflon's master was little Romolo, only ten years of age, and a cripple. Romolo—called Lolo—had taught Moufflon all he knew; and that all was a very great deal, for nothing more clever than Moufflon had ever walked upon four legs.

Why was he named Moufflon? When the poodle was given to them by a soldier, he was a white, woolly creature a year old, and the children's mother had said that he looked like a moufflon, as they call sheep in France.

White and woolly this dog re-

mained, and he became the handsomest and biggest poodle in all the city. The word Moufflon was ever the name by which he was known; it was not a pretty name, but it suited him and the children.

They lived in an old part of Florence, in that picturesque zigzag, which goes round the grand church of San Michele, where the tall, old houses are weather-beaten into the most beautiful hues. The pavement is covered with peddlers and stalls, and all kinds of trades are going on in the open air, in that bright, merry, beautiful Italian

custom, which, alas! is being driven away by new laws.

Moufflon and his friends lived in a high, dark, old house, with the sign of the lamb in wrought iron, which shows it was once a warehouse. They are all old houses here, drawn round about that grand church, which was once called a casket of silver.

It was a mighty casket, indeed, holding the Holy Spirit within it; and red, blue, and orange glowed in its niches and its windows. Its statues of the Apostles were strong and noble—St. Peter, with his keys, and St. Mark

with his open book, and St. George leaning on his sword.

The church stands firm as a rock, square as a fortress of stone. The winds and the waters of the skies may beat about it as they will, they have no power to disturb its repose. Sometimes I think that of all the noble things in Italy, San Michele is the noblest, standing silent amidst the people's hurrying feet and noisy laughter, a memory of God.

The little masters of Moufflon lived in its very shadow, where a bridge of

stone spans the space between the houses and the church.

Little Lolo loved the church with a great love. He loved it in the morning, when the sunbeams turned it into dusky gold and jasper; he loved it in the evening, when the lights of its altars glimmered in the dark, and the scent of its incense came out into the street; he loved it in the great feasts, when the huge clusters of lilies were borne inside it; he loved it in the solemn nights of winter, when the flickering gleam of the dull lamps shone on the robes of an apostle, or on

a shield. He loved it always, and, without knowing why, he called it *La mia Chiesa*.

Lolo, being lame and delicate, was not able to go to school or to work, though he wove straw and plaited cane matting with busy fingers. For the most part, he did as he liked, and spent most of his time sitting near San Michele, watching the vendors of earthenware, or trotting, with his crutch and Moufflon, down the street, under the arches of the Uffizzi, over the Jewelers' Bridge, and out by byways into the fields on the



THE BRIDGE OVER THE ARNO.

hillside, on the other bank of the Arno.

Moufflon and he would spend half the day—all the day—out there in daffodil-time; and Lolo would come home with great bundles and sheaves of golden flowers. He and Moufflon were very happy.

His mother never wished to say a harsh word to Lolo, for he was lame through her fault. She had let him fall in his babyhood, and the mischief done to him could not be undone. She never raised her voice to him, though she often did to the others—

to curly-pated Cecco, and pretty black-eyed Dina, and saucy Bice, and sturdy Beppo, and even to the good, manly, hard-working Tasso.

Tasso was the mainstay of the family, though he was but a gardener, working in the green Cascine, at small wages. All he earned he brought home to his mother. He, alone, kept in order the lazy, high-tempered Sandro; he, alone, kept in check Bice's love of finery; he, alone, made both ends meet, and kept bread always in the cupboard.

When his mother thought, as she

thought, indeed, almost ceaselessly, that in a few months he would be of age to go to the army, and was to be taken from her for three years, the poor soul believed her heart would break. Many a day, at twilight, she would start out, creep into the great church, and pour forth her soul in prayer.

Yet, pray as she would, no miracle could happen to make Tasso free of military service. If he drew a fatal number, go he must, even though it brought their ruin.

One morning, Lolo sat, as usual, on the steps of the church, Moufflon

beside him. It was a brilliant morning in September. The men at the hand-barrows and at the stalls were selling crockery, silk handkerchiefs, and straw hats about San Michele. Very blithe, good-natured, gay they were, for the most part, but bawling, and screaming, and shouting as if the sale of a penny pipkin or a twopenny pie-pan were the exchange of many thousands of pounds sterling.

It was about eleven o'clock; the barber at the corner was shaving a big man, with a cloth tucked about his chin, and his chair set well out

on the pavement; the sellers of the pipkins and pie-pans were screaming till they were hoarse, “ *Un solde l'uno, due soldi tre!* ” Big bronze bells were booming till they seemed to clang up to the deep-blue sky; some brethren of the Misericordia went by bearing a black bier; a large sheaf of glowing flowers—dahlias, zinnias, asters, and daturas—was borne through the huge arched door of the church, near St. Mark.

Lolo looked at it all, and so did Moufflon; and a stranger looked at them, as he left the church.

“You have a handsome poodle there, my little man,” said the stranger to Lolo, in a foreigner’s too distinct and careful Italian.

“Moufflon is beautiful,” said Lolo, with pride. “You should see him when he is just washed; but we can only wash him on Sundays, because then Tasso is at home.”

“How old is your dog?”

“Three years.”

“Does he do any tricks?”

“Does he!” said Lolo, with a laugh; “why, Moufflon can do anything! He can walk on two legs ever

so long; make ready, present, and fire, die, waltz, beg, of course, shut a door, make a wheelbarrow of himself; there is nothing he will not do. Should you like to see him do something?"

"Very much," said the stranger.

To Moufflon and to Lolo the street was the same thing as home. This cheery "piazzetta" by the church, so empty sometimes, and sometimes so noisy and crowded, was but the wider threshold of their home to both the poodle and the child.

So there, under the lofty and stately walls of the old church, Lolo put

Moufflon through his exercises. They were second nature to Moufflon, as to most poodles. He had inherited them from clever parents, and as he had never been frightened, all his lessons were but play to him.

He acquitted himself admirably, and the crockery-venders came and looked on. Even a monk came out of the church and smiled. The barber left his customer's chin all in a lather, while he laughed; for the good folk were all proud of Moufflon, and never tired of him.

The stranger, also, was much pleased



UFFIZI (öf-féd'zē), FLORENCE.

One of the Chief Art Galleries of the World.

at Moufflon's talents, and said, half aloud, "How this clever dog would amuse poor Victor! Would you bring your poodle to please a sick child I have at home?" he said, aloud. Lolo smiled, answered that he would, and asked, "Where is the sick child?"

"At the Grande Brittania; not far off," said the gentleman. "Come this afternoon, and ask for me."

He dropped his card and a couple of francs into Lolo's hand, and went his way. Lolo, with Moufflon scampering after him, dashed into his own house, and stumped up the stairs, his

crutch making a terrible noise on the stone.

“Mother, mother! See what I have got, because Moufflon did his tricks!” he shouted. “Now you can buy those shoes you want so much, and the coffee that you miss so in the morning, and the new linen for Tasso, and the shirts for Sandro;” for to the mind of Lolo two francs was as two millions.

In the afternoon he and Moufflon trotted along the arcades of the Uffizi, and down to the hotel of the stranger. On showing the card, which Lolo could not read, they were shown at

once into a great chamber, all gilding and fresco, and velvet furniture.

Lolo, being a little Florentine, was never troubled or daunted by mere sofas and chairs. He stood and looked around him, at perfect ease; and Moufflon, whose attitude, when he was not romping, was always one of gravity, sat on his haunches and did the same.

Soon the foreigner he had seen in the forenoon entered, spoke kindly to him, and led him into another chamber where, stretched on a couch, was a little wan-faced boy, about seven years

of age; a pretty boy, but so pale, so wasted, so helpless.

This poor little child was heir to a great name and a great fortune; but all the science in the world could not make him strong enough to run about among the daisies, or able to draw a single breath without pain. A feeble smile lit up his face as he saw Moufflon and Lolo; then a shadow chased it away.

“Little boy is lame like me,” he said, in a tongue Lolo did not understand.

“Yes; but he is a strong little boy,

and can move about, as perhaps this country will make you do," said the gentleman, who was the poor little boy's father. "He has brought his poodle to amuse you. What a handsome dog! Is it not?"

"Oh, *Buffins!*" said the poor little fellow, stretching out his wasted hands to Moufflon.

Then Lolo went through the performance, and Moufflon acquitted himself ably as ever; and the little invalid laughed and shouted with his tiny, thin voice, and enjoyed it all, raining cakes and biscuits on both the poodle

and its master. Lolo ate the pastry with willing white teeth, and Moufflon did no less. Then they got up to go, and the sick child on the couch burst into fretful weeping and outcries.

“I want the dog! I will have the dog!” he repeated.

But Lolo did not know what he said, and was only sorry to see him so unhappy.

“You shall have the dog to-morrow,” said the gentleman, to pacify his little son; and he hurried Lolo and Moufflon out of the room, having given Lolo five francs.

“Why, Moufflon,” said Lolo, with a chuckle of delight, “if we could find a foreigner every day, we could eat meat at supper, and go to the theater every evening!”

He and his crutch clattered home with great eagerness and excitement, and Moufflon trotted along, the blue bow, with which Bice had tied up his curls on the top of his head, fluttering in the wind. But, alas! even his francs could bring no comfort at home. He found the whole family wailing and moaning in distress.

Tasso had drawn his number that

morning, and he must go and be a soldier for three years.

The poor young man stood in the midst of his weeping brothers and sisters. His mother was leaning against his shoulder, and down his brown cheeks the tears were falling. He must go, and lose his place in the public gardens, and leave his mother to starve. He must be put in a soldier's jacket, and drafted off among cursing and swearing men and strange faces—friendless, homeless, miserable! And the mother—what would become of the mother?

Tasso was the best of lads and the mildest. He was quite happy sweeping up the leaves in the long alleys of the garden, or mowing the green lawns under the ilex avenues, and coming home at supper-time to the merry little people and the good woman that he loved. He was quite contented; he wanted nothing, only to be let alone; and they would not let him alone. They would take him away, put a heavy musket in his hand, and a heavy knapsack on his back, and drill him, and make him into a human target.

No one paid any attention to Lolo

and his five francs. Moufflon, understanding that some great sorrow had fallen on his friends, sat down, and lifted up his voice, and howled.

Tasso must go away!—that was all they understood. For three long years they must go without the sight of his face, the aid of his strength, the pleasure of his smile. Tasso must go!

When Lolo understood what had befallen them, he gathered Moufflon up against his breast, sat down on the floor beside him, and cried as if he would never stop crying.

There was no help for it! It was

one of those misfortunes which are like a stone tumbled on the head. The stone drops from a height, and the poor head bows under the unseen blow. That is all.

“What is the use of that?” said the mother, passionately, when Lolo showed her his five francs. “It will not buy Tasso’s discharge.”

Lolo felt that his mother was cruel and unjust, and crept to bed with Moufflon. The next morning Lolo got up before sunrise, and he and Moufflon went with Tasso to his work in the garden.

Lolo loved his brother, and clung to him every moment while they could still be together.

“Can nothing keep you, Tasso?” he said, as they went down the leafy aisles, where the Arno was growing golden as the sun rose.

Tasso sighed.

“Nothing, dear; unless Jesus would send me a thousand francs to buy a substitute.”

He knew he might as well have said, “If one could coin gold ducats out of the sunbeams on the Arno.”

Lolo was very sorrowful as he lay

on the grass in the meadow, where Tasso was at work, and the poodle lay stretched beside him.

When Lolo went home to dinner, he found his mother very strange, laughing one moment, crying the next. She was peevish and tender by turns. There was something forced and feverish about her which the children felt, but did not comprehend. She was a woman of not very much intelligence; she had a secret, which she carried ill, and knew not what to do with it; but they could not tell that. They only felt timid at her manner.

The meal over,—it was only bean-soup, and that is soon eaten,—the mother said sharply to Lolo, “Your Aunt Anita wants you this afternoon. She has to go out, and you are needed to stay with the children; be off with you.”

Lolo was an obedient child; he took his hat and jumped up as quickly as his lameness would let him. He called Moufflon.

“Leave the dog,” said his mother, sharply. “’Nita will not have him carrying mud about her nice clean rooms. She told me so. Leave him, I say.”

“Leave Moufflon!” echoed Lolo, for never in all Moufflon’s life had Lolo parted from him. Leave Moufflon! He stared open-eyed and open-mouthed at his mother. What could have come to her?

“Leave him, I say,” she repeated, more sharply than ever. “Must I speak twice to my own children? Be off with you, and leave the dog.”

She clutched Moufflon by his long, silky mane and dragged him backwards, while with the other hand she thrust out of the door Lolo and Bice.

Lolo began to hammer with his

crutch at the door thus closed on him; but Bice coaxed him.

“Poor mother has been so worried about Tasso,” she pleaded. “What harm can come to Moufflon? I think he was tired, Lolo; the garden is a long way; and it is quite true that Aunt 'Nita never liked him.”

By one means and another, she coaxed her brother away; and they went almost in silence to where their Aunt Anita dwelt, which was across the river, near the dark-red bell-shaped dome of Santa Spirito.

It was true that her aunt had

wanted them to care for her room and her babies, while she was away carrying some lace to a villa outside the Roman gate, for she was a lace-washer and clear-starcher by trade. There they had to stay in the little dark room with the two babies, with nothing to amuse them except the clang of the bells of the Church of the Holy Spirit, and the voices of the lemonade-sellers in the street below.

Aunt Anita did not return until it was more than dusk, and the two children trotted homeward, hand in hand, Lolo's leg dragging itself pain-

fully along, for without Moufflon's white figure dancing on before him, he felt very tired indeed. It was pitch dark when they got to San Michele, and the lamps burned dimly.

Lolo stumped up the stairs wearily, with a dull fear at his small heart.

"Moufflon, Moufflon!" he called. Where was Moufflon? Always at the first sound of his crutch, the poodle came flying towards him. "Moufflon, Moufflon!" he called, all the way up the long, dark, stone stair. He pushed open the door, and he called again, "Moufflon, Moufflon!"

But no dog answered to his call.

“Mother, where is Moufflon?” he asked, staring with blinking, dazzled eyes into the oil-lit room, where his mother sat knitting. Tasso was not then home from work. His mother went on with her knitting; there was an uneasy look on her face.

“Mother, what have you done with Moufflon, *my* Moufflon?” said Lolo, with a look that was almost stern on his ten-year-old face.

Then his mother, without looking up, and moving her knitting-needles very rapidly, said:

“Moufflon is sold!”

And little Dina, who was a quick, pert child, cried, with a shrill voice:

“Mother has sold him for a thousand francs to the foreign gentleman.”

“Sold him!”

Lolo grew white, and cold as ice; he stammered, threw up his hands over his head, gasped a little for breath, then fell in a dead swoon, his poor useless limb doubled under him.

When Tasso came home that sad night, and found his little brother shivering, moaning, delirious, and when

he heard what had been done, he was sorely grieved.

“Oh, mother! how could you do it?” he cried. “Poor, poor Moufflon! and Lolo loves him so!”

“I have got the money,” said his mother, nervously, “and you will not need to go for a soldier; we can buy your substitute. What is a poodle, that you mourn about it? We can get another poodle for Lolo.”

“Another will not be Moufflon,” said Tasso, and yet he was seized with such frantic happiness at the knowledge that he need not go to the

army, that he had not the heart to rebuke his mother.

“A thousand francs!” he muttered; “a thousand francs! *Dio Mio!*” Who could ever have fancied anybody would give such a price for a common white poodle!”

“Fools and their money are soon parted,” said his mother.

It was true: she had sold Moufflon.

The English gentleman had called on her, while Lolo and the dog had been in the gardens, and had said that he wished to buy the poodle which had so pleased his sick child, that the

little invalid would not be comforted unless he possessed it.

Now, at any other time, the good woman would have refused to sell Moufflon; but that morning the thousand francs, which would buy Tasso's substitute, were forever in her mind and before her eyes. When she heard the stranger, her heart gave a great leap, and her head swam giddily, and she thought, in a spasm of longing,—if she could get a thousand francs!

Though she was dizzy, she said nothing of her need of money, not a word of her sore distress, but finally

let fall a hint that she would take a thousand francs for poor Moufflon.

The gentleman said if she would take the poodle to his hotel that afternoon, the money should be paid to her; then she sent her children away and took Moufflon to his doom. She could not believe her senses, when ten hundred-franc notes were put into her hand. She scrawled her signature to a receipt, and went away, leaving Moufflon in his new owner's rooms, hearing his howls, and moans, all the way down the staircase and out into the air.

She was not easy at what she had done.

“It seemed,” she said to herself, “like selling a child.”

But then to keep her eldest son at home—what a joy that was! On the whole, she cried so, and laughed so, as she went down the street, that once or twice people looked at her, thinking her out of her senses, and a guard spoke to her angrily.

Now Lolo was sick, and delirious with grief. Twenty times he got out of his bed and screamed to go with Moufflon, and twenty times his mother

and his brothers put him back again, and held him down, and tried in vain to quiet him.

The child was beside himself with misery. "Moufflon! Moufflon!" he sobbed, at every moment. By night he was in a raging fever, and when his mother, frightened, ran and called the doctor, he shook his head and said something as to a shock of the nervous system, and muttered a long word.

Lolo hated the sight of Tasso, and thrust his mother away, too.

"It is for you Moufflon is sold," he

said, with his little teeth and hands tightly clenched.

After a day or two, Tasso felt as if he could not bear his life, and went down to the hotel to see if the gentleman would allow him to have Moufflon back for half an hour, to quiet his little brother by a sight of his pet. At the hotel he was told that the *Milord Inglese*, who had bought the dog, had gone that same night to Rome, to Naples, to Palermo, *Chi sa?*

“And Moufflon with him?” asked Tasso.

“The *barbone* he had bought went

with him," said the porter of the hotel. "Such a beast! Howling, shrieking, raging all the day, and scratching all the wood of the *salon* door."

Poor Moufflon! Tasso's heart was heavy as he heard of the sad, helpless misery of their favorite and friend.

"What matter!" said his mother, fiercely, when he told her. "A dog is a dog. They will feed him better than we could. In a week he will have forgotten!"

But Tasso feared that Moufflon would not forget. Lolo certainly would not. The doctor came to the

bedside twice a day, and ice and water were kept on the aching, hot, little head. Lolo lay quiet, dull, and stupid, breathing heavily, and then crying, sobbing, and shrieking hysterically for Moufflon.

“Can you not get what he calls for to quiet him with a sight of it?” said the doctor. That, however, was not possible, and the poor mother covered her head with her apron and felt a guilty creature.

“Still, you will not go to the army,” she said to Tasso, clinging to that great joy. “Only think! we can pay

Guido Squarcione to go for you. He always said he would go, if anybody would pay him. Oh, my Tasso, surely to keep you is worth a dog's life!"

"And Lolo's?" asked Tasso, gloomily. "Nay, mother, it works ill to meddle too much with fate. I drew my number; I ought to go. Heaven would have made it up to you somehow."

"Heaven sent me the stranger; the Madonna's own self sent him to ease a mother's pain," said Rosina, rapidly and angrily. "There are the thousand

francs safe in hand, and what, pray, is it we miss? Only a dog like a sheep, that brought mud in with him every time it rained, and ate as much as any one of you."

"But Lolo?" said Tasso, under his breath.

"Lolo was always a little fool, thinking of nothing but the church, and the dog, and worthless field-flowers," she said, angrily. "I humored him too much, because of the hurt to his hip, and so—and so"—

Then the poor soul made matters worse by dropping her tears into the

saucepan, and fanning the charcoal so furiously that the flame caught her fan of cane-leaves, and would have burned her had not Tasso been there.

“You are my safety always. Who would not have done what I did?” she said, with a great sob.

All this did not cure poor Lolo.

The days and the weeks of the golden autumn weather passed, and he was always in danger. The small, close room where he slept, with Sandio and Beppo and Tasso, was not one to cure such an illness as had now beset him. Sick at heart, Tasso went to his

work, where the flowers among the meadow-grass, and the ashes and elms were taking their first flush of the coming autumnal change. He did not think Lolo would ever get well, and the good lad felt as if he had been the murderer of his little brother.

True, he had no hand or voice in the sale of Moufflon, but Moufflon had been sold for his sake. It made him feel half guilty, very unhappy, quite unworthy of all the sacrifice that had been made for him. "Nobody should meddle with fate," thought Tasso.

It was joy, indeed, to know that he

was free of the army, for a time, at least; that he might go on at his healthful labor, and get a rise in wages as time went on, and dwell in peace with his family, and perhaps,—perhaps in time earn enough to marry pretty, flaxen-haired Blondina, the daughter of the barber in the piazzeta. It was joy, indeed; but then, poor Moufflon!—and poor, poor Lolo! Tasso felt as if he had bought his own happiness by seeing his little brother and the good dog buried alive.

Where was poor Moufflon?

Gone far away, somewhere south,

in the hurrying, screeching train, that made Tasso giddy only to look at, as it rushed by the green meadows beyond the garden, on its way to the sea.

“If he could see the dog he cries so for, it might save him,” said the doctor, who stood with a grave face watching Lolo.

That was beyond any one's power. No one could tell where Moufflon was. He might be carried away to England, to France, to Russia, to America — who could say? They did not know where his purchaser

had gone. Moufflon even might be dead.

The poor mother, when the doctor said that, went and looked at the ten hundred-franc notes that were once like angels' faces to her, and said to them:

“Oh, why did you tempt me? I sold the poor, innocent beast to get you, and now my child is dying!”

Her eldest son would stay at home, indeed; but if this little lame one died! Rosina Calabucci would have given up the notes, and consented never to own five francs in her life if only she

could have gone back over the time and kept Moufflon, and seen his little master running out with him in the sunshine.

More than a month went by, and Lolo lay in the same state, his yellow hair shorn, his eyes stupid, life kept in him by a spoonful of milk, a lump of ice, a drink of lemon-water; always muttering, when he spoke at all, "Moufflon, Moufflon, Moufflon!" and lying for days together, with the fire eating at his brain, and the weight lying on it like a stone.

The neighbors were kind, and

brought fruit, and sat up with him, and chattered so all at once, that they were enough in themselves to kill him, for such is the Italian fashion of sympathy in illness.

Lolo did not get well, did not even seem to see the light around him; and the doctor in plain words told Rosina that her little boy must die. She could not believe it. Could St. Mark, and St. George, and the rest that he had loved so, do nothing for him?

No, the doctor said, they could do nothing; the dog might do something,

since the brain had so fastened on that one idea; but then they had sold the dog.

“Yes; I sold him!” said the poor mother, breaking into floods of tears.

At last, the end drew so nigh, that one twilight the priest came out of the great arched door that is next St. Mark's, passed across the piazzetta, and up the dark staircase of Rosina's dwelling. He passed through the weeping, terrified children, and went to the bedside of Lolo.

Lolo was unconscious, but the holy man touched his little body and limbs

with the sacred oil, prayed over him, and then stood sorrowful, with bowed head.

Lolo had had his first communion in the summer, and in his preparation for it, had won the priest's gentle heart.

Standing there, the holy man commended the innocent soul to God. It was the last service, save that very last of all when the funeral service should be read above his little grave, among the nameless dead at the sepulchres of the poor.

All was still, as the priest's voice ceased; only the sobs of the mother,

and of the children, broke the stillness as they kneeled.

Suddenly, there was a loud scuffling noise. Hurrying feet came patter, patter up the stairs, a ball of mud and dust flew over the heads of the kneeling figures; fleet as the wind Moufflon dashed through the room and leaped upon the bed.

Lolo opened his heavy eyes, and a light gleamed in them like a sunbeam. "Moufflon!" he murmured, in his little, thin, faint voice. The dog pressed close to his breast and kissed his wasted face.

Moufflon was come home!

And Lolo came home, too, for death let go its hold upon him. Little by little, very faintly, very uncertainly at first, life returned to the poor wasted body, and reason to the heated little brain. Moufflon was his physician. Moufflon, himself a skeleton under his matted curls, would not stir from his side, and looked at him all day long with two beaming brown eyes full of unutterable love.

Lolo was happy; he asked no questions,—was too weak, indeed, to wonder. He had Moufflon; that was enough.

Alas! though they dared not say so in his hearing, it was not enough for his elders. His mother and Tasso knew that the poodle had been sold and paid for; that they could lay no claim to keep him; and that almost certainly his purchaser would seek him out and assert his right to him. How would Lolo ever bear that second parting? — Lolo, so weak that he weighed no more than if he had been a little bird.

Moufflon had come a long distance and suffered much. He was but skin and bone; he bore the marks of blows

and kicks; his once silken hair was discolored and matted. He had, no doubt, traveled far. Yet his purchaser would be sure to ask for him, soon or late; and then? If they did not give him up themselves, the law would make them.

Rosina Calabucci and Tasso, though they dared say nothing before any of the children, felt their hearts throb at every step on the stair, and the first question of Tasso every evening when he came from his work was, "Has any one come for Moufflon?" For ten days no one came, and their terrors lulled a little.

On the eleventh morning, a feast-day, on which Tasso was not going to his labors, there came a person, with a foreign look, who said the words they so much dreaded to hear: "Has the poodle that you sold to an English gentleman come back to you?"

"Yes."

The servant said they had missed the dog in Rome a few days after taking him there; that he had been searched for in vain, and that his master had thought it possible the animal might have found his way back to his old home: there had been

stories of such wonderful sagacity in dogs. He had sent for him on the chance. The gentleman was back in Florence. The servant pulled from his pocket a chain, and said his orders were to take the poodle away at once. The little sick gentleman had fretted very much about his loss.

Tasso heard in an agony of despair. To take Moufflon away now would be to kill Lolo,—Lolo so feeble still, so unable to understand, so alive to every sight and sound of Moufflon, lying for hours together motionless with his hand buried in the poodle's curls,

saying nothing, only smiling now and then, and murmuring a word or two in Moufflon's ear.

“The dog did come home,” said Tasso, at length, in a low voice; “angels must have shown him the road, poor beast! From Rome! Only to think of it, from Rome! and he a dumb thing! I tell you he is here, honestly; so will you not trust me just so far as this? Will you let me go with you and speak to the English lord, before you take the dog away? I have a little brother sorely ill” —

He could not speak more, for tears that choked his voice.

At last the messenger agreed so far as this. Tasso might go first and see the master, but he would stay here and have a care that they did not send the dog away,—“for a thousand francs were paid for him,” added the man, “and a dog that can come all the way from Rome by itself must be a wonderful creature.”

Tasso thanked him, and went upstairs, thankful that his mother was at mass. He took the ten hundred-franc notes from the old oak desk, and with

them in his breast-pocket walked out into the air.

He was only a working lad, but he had made up his mind to do an heroic deed, for self-sacrifice is always heroic. He went straightway to the hotel where the English *milord* was, and when he had got there remembered that still he did not know the name of Moufflon's owner. The people of the hotel knew Rosina Calabucci's son, guessed what he wanted, and said the gentleman who had lost the poodle was upstairs, and they would tell him.

Tasso waited a half-hour, his heart

beating against the packet of hundred-franc notes. At last he was beckoned upstairs, and there he saw a foreigner with a mild face, a lovely lady, and a delicate child, who was lying on a couch.

“Moufflon! Where is Moufflon?” cried the little child, as he saw the youth enter.

Tasso took his hat off, and stood in the doorway, brown, healthy, not ungraceful in his working clothes of rough, blue stuff.

“If you please, most illustrious,” he stammered, “poor Moufflon has come home.”

The child gave a cry of delight; the gentleman and lady one of wonder. "Come home! All the way from Rome!"

"Yes, he has, most illustrious," said Tasso, gaining courage and eloquence; "and now I want to beg something of you. We are poor, and I drew a number in the army, and it was for that my mother sold Moufflon. For myself, I did not know anything of it; but she thought she would buy my substitute, and of course she could; but Moufflon is come home, and my little brother Lolo, the little boy you first saw playing with the poodle, fell

ill of the grief at losing Moufflon, and for a month has lain saying nothing sensible, but only calling for the dog. Lolo was so near dying that he had his last communion, and the holy oil had been put on him, when all at once there rushed in Moufflon, skin and bone, and covered with mud, and at the sight of him Lolo came back to his senses. That was ten days ago, and though Lolo is still as weak as a new-born thing, he is always sensible, and takes what we give him to eat, and lies looking at Moufflon, and smiling, and saying, 'Moufflon! Moufflon!'

“I know well you have bought the dog, and the law is with you, and by the law you claim it; but I thought, perhaps, as Lolo loves him so, you would let us keep the dog, and would take back the thousand francs, and I will go and be a soldier, and heaven will take care of them all somehow.”

Tasso, having said all this in one breath, took the thousand francs out of his breast-pocket and held them out timidly toward the foreign gentleman, who motioned them aside, and stood silent.

“Did you understand, Victor?” he said, at last, to his little son.

The child hid his face in his cushions.

“Yes, I did understand something; let Lolo keep him; Moufflon was not happy with me.”

He burst out crying as he said it.

Moufflon had run away from him.

Moufflon had never loved him, for all his sweet cakes, and fond caresses, and platefuls of delicate meats. Moufflon had run away, and found his own road over two hundred miles and more, to go back to some little hungry children, who never had enough to eat, and certainly could never give

enough to the dog. Poor little boy! He was so rich, and so pampered, and so powerful, and yet he could never make Moufflon love him!

Tasso, who understood nothing that was said, laid the ten hundred-franc notes down on a table near him.

“If you would take them, most illustrious, and give me back what my mother wrote when she sold Moufflon,” he said, timidly, “I would pray for you night and day, and Lolo would, too; and as for the dog, we will get a puppy and train him for your little *signorino*. They can all do

tricks, more or less,—it comes by nature; and as for me, I will go to the army willingly; it is not right to interfere with fate; only, I do pray of you, do not take away Moufflon. He trotted all those miles and miles, and you carried him by train, too, and he never could have seen the road, and he has no power of speech to ask”—

Tasso broke down again, and drew the back of his hand across his wet eyelashes.

The English gentleman was not altogether unmoved.

“Poor, faithful dog!” he said, with a

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sigh. "I am afraid we were very cruel to him, meaning to be kind. No; we will not claim him, and I do not think you should go for a soldier; you seem so good a lad, and your mother must need you. Keep the money, my boy, and in payment you shall train up the puppy you talk of, and bring him to my little boy. I will come and see your mother and Lolo to-morrow. All the way from Rome! What wonderful sagacity! What matchless fidelity!"

You can imagine, without any telling of mine, the joy in Moufflon's home

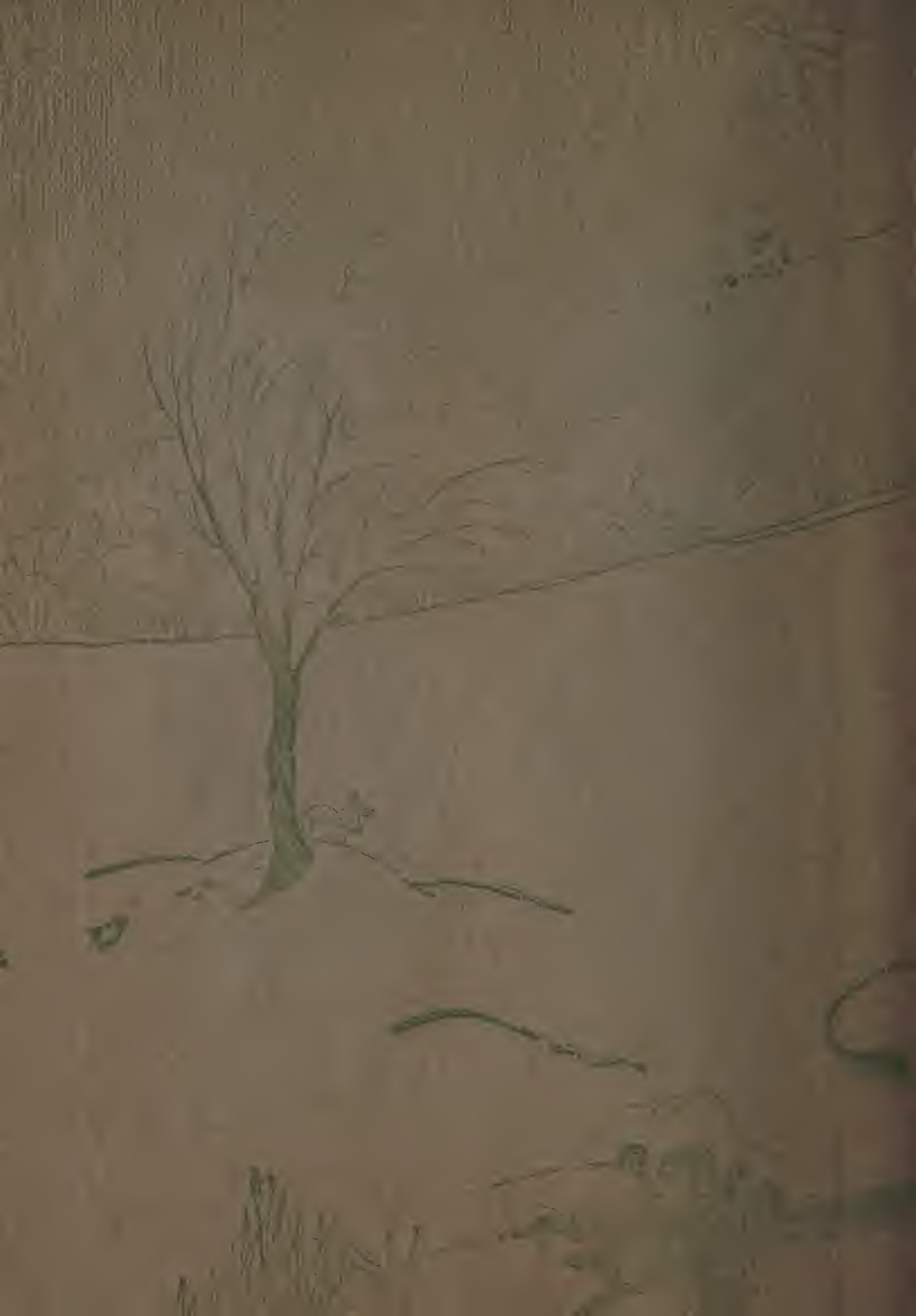
when Tasso returned with the money and the good tidings. His substitute was bought without a day's delay, and Lolo rapidly recovered. As for Moufflon, he could never tell his troubles, his wanderings, his difficulties, his perils; he could never tell them by what knowledge he had found his way across Italy, from the gates of Rome to the gates of Florence; but he soon grew plump again, and merry, and his love for Lolo was greater than before.

In the winter, all the family went to live near Spezia, on an estate that the English gentleman had purchased, and

there Moufflon was happier than ever. The little English boy gained strength in the soft air, and he and Lolo were great friends, and played with Moufflon and the poodle puppy half the day upon the sunny terraces, and under the green orange boughs. Tasso was one of the gardeners. Lolo, whose lameness always kept him from military service, when he grew to be a man became a florist, and a great one.

“But, oh, Moufflon, how *did* you find your way home?” he asks the dog a hundred times a week.

How, indeed!



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